

From: POLITICO Pro Energy
To: megan_bloomgren@ios.doi.gov
Subject: Afternoon Energy, presented by Trout Unlimited: Group wants inquiry into Pruitt bodyguards — India stands with Paris — NRDC sues EPA over FOIAs
Date: Thursday, May 11, 2017 2:24:26 PM

By Kelsey Tamborrino | 05/11/2017 03:20 PM EDT

With help from Alex Guillén and Anthony Adragna

GROUP WANTS INQUIRY INTO PRUITT PROTECTION DETAIL: An environmental group today [asked](#) EPA's inspector general to look into Administrator Scott Pruitt's new round-the-clock protection detail. The Environmental Integrity Project argues that the added expense of providing 24/7 security for Pruitt may be an inappropriate or excessive use of taxpayer money, particularly amid massive proposed budget cuts to enforcement and other agency programs.

The Trump administration's "skinny budget" last month asked to reassign 10 enforcement agents to Pruitt's protection detail, doubling the number that typically provided security in the past. "Former Administrator Gina McCarthy was threatened with impeachment, charged with 'treason,' and called every name in the book by right-wing extremists and internet trolls," said EIP Director Eric Schaeffer, a former head of EPA's civil enforcement. "The taxpayers ought to know why Scott Pruitt needs a bodyguard squad more than twice as big as the one she had."

Welcome to Afternoon Energy. I'm your host Kelsey Tamborrino. Send your thoughts, news and tips to ktamborrino@politico.com, mdaily@politico.com and njuliano@politico.com, and keep up with us on Twitter at [@kelseytam](https://twitter.com/kelseytam), [@dailym1](https://twitter.com/dailym1), [@nickjuliano](https://twitter.com/nickjuliano), [@Morning_Energy](https://twitter.com/Morning_Energy) and [@POLITICOPro](https://twitter.com/POLITICOPro).

INDIA STANDS WITH PARIS: An Indian government energy official said today that India would remain in the Paris deal, regardless of whether President Donald Trump decides to pull the U.S. out of the agreement. "The road from Paris to today has been somewhat bumpy. We will have to sort that out," Indian Minister Piyush Goyal told the Vienna Energy Forum. "But I'd like to reassure each one of you here today that India stands committed to its commitments made at Paris irrespective of what happens in the rest of the world."

NRDC FILES EPA SUIT: The Natural Resources Defense Council filed [a lawsuit](#) today asking a New York federal court to order EPA to release of records relating to Administrator Pruitt's ethical obligations, Alex Guillén [reports](#). The environmental group says EPA has failed to release records it requested related to a Feb. 17 press release announcing Pruitt's confirmation, filings made by EPA in ongoing Waters of the United States litigation after Pruitt's confirmation, an agency memo on settlement and consent decree policies, and Pruitt's recusal and ethics waivers.

CANTWELL HITS HANFORD SATURDAY: Senate Energy ranking member [Maria Cantwell](#) told reporters today she'll visit Hanford this Saturday after a partial cave-in of a tunnel at the Cold War nuclear weapons cleanup site in eastern Washington earlier this week. "This is why we always have to keep moving forward on Hanford cleanup because we know what levels of contamination are there, and we just have to keep moving forward to get it done," she said.

Energy Secretary Rick Perry [said](#) today that crews had "completed filling in the hole" at the collapsed tunnel and vowing "to identify and implement longer-term measures to further reduce risks." And the Washington Department of Ecology issued [an enforcement order](#) late Wednesday night requiring DOE to determine the cause of the collapse; assess the risk of further incidents; ensure the radioactive and chemical waste are stored safely; and submit a plan for permanently cleaning up waste in the tunnels.

**** A message from Trout Unlimited:** For over 50 years, Trout Unlimited has been dedicated to conserving, protecting and restoring North America's coldwater fisheries and watersheds on behalf of today's anglers and coming generations of sportsmen and women. Join us as we support America's public lands and national monuments: <http://bit.ly/2paVoYB> **

SENATORS PROPOSE TAX CREDITS FOR OFFSHORE WIND: Sens. [Ed Markey](#) and [Sheldon Whitehouse](#), along with Rep. [Jim Langevin](#), reintroduced legislation today to extend tax credits for the offshore wind industry. "The Offshore Wind Incentives for New Development Act" would extend the 30 percent investment tax credit for offshore wind through 2025, according to a release on the legislation. Read the text [here](#).

MARYLAND GRANTS INCENTIVES TO TWO OFFSHORE WIND PROJECTS: The Maryland Public Service Commission today [approved](#) state offshore wind energy credits for U.S. Wind, Inc. and Deepwater Wind's Skipjack Offshore Energy projects. The PSC conditioned the incentives on factors including that the projects create a certain number of local jobs and clear other regulatory hurdles. The state incentives, which could total \$1.8 billion, are a key factor in the two offshore wind projects going forward. U.S. Wind is a subsidiary of Italian renewable developer Renexia SpA.

SOLARWORLD MULLING CLOSING U.S. PLANT: German company SolarWorld AG, the largest manufacturer of crystalline silicon photovoltaic panels in the U.S., yesterday announced it will file for insolvency and that it is mulling whether to close down its U.S. operations including its plant in Oregon. In a [statement](#), the company said it was in more debt than it thinks it can dig out of due to "ongoing price erosion and the development of the business."

OPPOSITION TO SOLAR COMPANY'S TRADE CASE SHINES BRIGHT: The solar industry is ramping up its protests against a case that solar manufacturer Suniva filed at the International Trade Commission requesting safeguard duties on imports of solar panels flooding the market. Sunnova, a Houston-based solar services provider, added its voice to the growing chorus of businesses and industry groups opposing the case, saying an affirmative ruling would damage the domestic solar industry and the 260,000-odd jobs it provides.

"This proposed action by a small investment firm that made a poor investment decision should not be allowed to hurt American jobs and consumers," Sunnova CEO William Berger wrote in a letter to ITC Secretary Lisa Barton. (h/t [Morning Trade](#))

CAP LOOKING INTO TRUMP MONUMENT REVIEW: The Center for American Progress has filed public records requests with DOJ hoping to uncover whether the Trump administration plans to revisit a 1938 Attorney General opinion that the president does not have authority to rescind national monuments created under the Antiquities Act. The opinion is the linchpin of environmental group's arguments that the president lacks that authority but the question has never been challenged in court. Trump has ordered Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to review nearly two dozen national monuments created by the last three presidents but

Trump has yet to indicate just how far he believes his authority extends.

MAIL CALL — PEBBLE MIND WOULD BE 'CATASTROPHIC': Cantwell sent a letter to the president today, warning him against tossing aside Clean Water Act safeguards to settle a lawsuit that would allow Pebble Bay Mine to move forward. "The science is clear: the proposed Pebble Mine would result in catastrophic and irreversible damage to Bristol Bay salmon and the jobs that depend on them," Cantwell wrote. Read it [here](#).

REPORT: OLIVER TO HEAD NMFS: A coalition of commercial fishing, Native and environmentalists look poised to [get](#) the candidate they wanted to head the National Marine Fisheries Service. Chris Oliver, executive director of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council in Anchorage, Alaska, told his staff via email on Wednesday that he has tentatively been offered and accepted the position of NMFS assistant administrator, [Seafoodnews.com reports](#).

LEPAGE TURN: Maine Gov. Paul LePage won't run for Senate, one of his top political advisers said on Wednesday. For months LePage had been hinting at potentially jumping into the Republican primary to challenge Sen. [Angus King](#), the independent senator who caucuses with Democrats. But after a 40-minute meeting with Maine state Sen. Eric Brakey, LePage's senior political adviser released a statement that LePage would not run. More [here](#) from Daniel Strauss.

QUICK HITS:

- Exxon Mobil buying petrochemical plant for nearly \$2 billion, [FuelFix](#).
- Legislature dismantles Colorado Energy Office, passes major spending bill on final day, [Denver Business Journal](#).
- Tesla starts taking orders for premium solar roofs, [Reuters](#).
- Top advisory groups dormant at DOE, White House, [E&E News](#).
- Global stocks turn lower while oil keeps recovering, [the Associated Press](#).

WIDE WORLD OF POLITICS:

- [Rosenstein takes heat](#) over role in Comey firing
- [Sessions emerges](#) as Trump's most valuable ally
- FBI agent groups dispute Trump's rationale [for Comey firing](#)

**** A message from Trout Unlimited:** For over 100 years the Antiquities Act has been a bipartisan tool for conserving America's public lands and our outdoor heritage. Since the time President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Act into law, the Antiquities Act has provided for the long-term conservation of some of the best fish and wildlife habitat and hunting and angling opportunities in the country, spurring local economies. In these places, locally driven conservation efforts need to be preserved and celebrated. Currently, the Department of the Interior is reviewing national monuments designations. Secretary Zinke has strongly supported keeping America's public lands in public hands. Join us in showing him that we support upholding our national monuments: <http://bit.ly/2paVoYB> **

To view online:

<https://www.politicopro.com/tipsheets/afternoon-energy/2017/05/group-wants-inquiry-into-pruitt-bodyguards-022797>

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NRDC sues EPA for Pruitt recusal details, other records [Back](#)

By Alex Guillén | 05/11/2017 11:07 AM EDT

The Natural Resources Defense Council today [sued](#) EPA in federal court in New York, seeking records related to Administrator Scott Pruitt's potential conflicts of interest in certain lawsuits and other issues.

The environmental group says EPA has failed to release records it requested related to a Feb. 17 press release announcing Pruitt's confirmation, filings made by EPA in ongoing Waters of the United States litigation after Pruitt's confirmation, an agency memo on settlement and consent decree policies, and Pruitt's recusal and ethics waivers.

"Scott Pruitt's EPA sounds more like an industry association than a public health agency," NRDC attorney Jon Devine said in a statement. "The American public deserves to know what's behind EPA's decisions and statements that conflict with the agency's long-standing mission."

Pruitt [signed a memo](#) last week detailing his plans to step aside from various ongoing lawsuits in which Oklahoma had been involved, though he did not also recuse himself from rulemakings related to those suits. The NRDC in a blog post today [criticized](#) that memo, saying it "creates more questions than it answers," and the group's suit asks for further records on the matter.

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Report: Oliver has accepted top job at NMFS [Back](#)

By Jason Huffman | 05/11/2017 02:14 PM EDT

A large coalition of commercial fishing, Native and environmental groups look poised to get the candidate they wanted to head the National Marine Fisheries Service, the leading agency for regulating fishing in the U.S.

Chris Oliver, executive director of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council in Anchorage, Alaska, told his staff via email on Wednesday that he has tentatively been offered and accepted the position of NMFS assistant administrator, [Seafoodnews.com](#) reports. The appointment is "still subject to the White House vetting and approval process, which may take a few weeks, so it is NOT final yet," he said, according to the report.

There has not been an official announcement from the White House or Commerce

Department, within which NMFS resides. His first day would be June 19.

Trident Seafoods and Icicle Seafoods, Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers, Alaska Marine Conservation Council, Pacific Seafoods Processors Association and United Fishermen's Marketing Association were among a group of more than four dozen organizations to write in support of Oliver's candidacy for the position in January, according to the Cordova Times. They noted his 26 years with the federal fisheries council.

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Maine Gov. LePage won't run for Senate [Back](#)

By Daniel Strauss | 05/10/2017 09:49 PM EDT

Maine Gov. Paul LePage won't run for Senate, one of his top political advisers said in a statement on Wednesday.

The statement from LePage's senior political adviser, Brent Littlefield, came hours after LePage met privately with Maine state Sen. Eric Brakey, according to Republicans with knowledge of the conversation.

During the 40-minute meeting, LePage told Brakey, who is running in the Republican primary for the U.S. Senate, that he would not run for Senate.

"Governor Paul LePage has helped the state of Maine achieve the largest number of private sector jobs in history, implement the largest tax cut in state history, ... and implement reforms which have resulted in Maine showing a significant revenue surplus earlier this year and, while these accomplishments are great, there is more to do," Littlefield said in a statement. "Therefore the Governor will remain focused on the job at hand and not enter the United States Senate race in 2018."

For months LePage had been hinting at potentially jumping into the Republican primary to challenge Sen. Angus King, the independent senator who caucuses with Democrats.

"As [LePage] contemplates and decides his next move after his term ends, we look forward to having his support as we work side by side to end the reign of Angus King and restore liberty for little guy [sic] not just in Maine, but down in Washington, D.C.," the Brakey campaign said in a statement.

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Rosenstein takes heat over role in Comey firing [Back](#)

By Josh Gerstein and Josh Dawsey | 05/11/2017 01:03 PM EDT

Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein faced increased pressure Thursday from Democrats and other critics to explain and justify his role in President Donald Trump's abrupt firing of FBI Director James Comey.

Senator Dianne Feinstein said Thursday she was mystified by the three-page memo Rosenstein prepared, which Trump cited Tuesday as the basis for Comey's dismissal. In it, the Justice Department's No. 2 official said Comey had done serious damage to the FBI's reputation as a result of his handling of the investigation into Hillary Clinton's private email account.

"I've now read Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein's memo three times. With each read I've become more troubled by the contents of this unusual document," said Feinstein, the top Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, which oversees the Justice Department and the FBI.

"Instead of a document that provides meaningful analysis, the memo reads like political document. It includes quotes from op-eds and television appearances that are as old as six months. It doesn't include any contemporary insights from inside the FBI. The memo appears to have been hastily assembled to justify a preordained outcome," she added.

Amid growing scrutiny, Rosenstein was seen arriving Thursday at the Senate Intelligence Committee on Capitol Hill, where he met with Sens. Richard Burr (R-N.C.) and Mark Warner (D-Va.), the chairman and vice chairman. They departed from an ongoing public committee hearing at about the same time Rosenstein arrived.

The fresh criticism of Rosenstein came after a Washington Post [report](#) that he threatened to resign when White House officials publicly described him as the driving force behind Comey's firing. A Trump administration official and a source close to the White House denied the report.

"It's total bullshit. He didn't threaten to resign," said one Trump adviser involved in discussions on the subject.

Regardless, the White House's explanation of Rosenstein's role in the Comey flap has evolved over the past 48 hours.

On Tuesday night, White House press secretary Sean Spicer initially cast Rosenstein as having set in motion Comey's ouster and repeatedly noted that the Maryland-based federal law enforcement official was appointed by President Barack Obama.

Spicer said Trump was acting on Rosenstein's recommendation and pointed out that Rosenstein won confirmation by a 94-6 vote.

Rosenstein is "highly respected" and "no one questions his integrity," Spicer said Tuesday. "Have you read the letter?" Spicer asked, casting it as something the Justice Department official spontaneously produced.

However, on Wednesday, White House officials acknowledged that timeline was wrong and that Trump decided by Monday that he wanted to fire Comey and then asked Rosenstein and Attorney General Jeff Sessions to prepare a justification for it.

Trump also conceded in an interview Thursday that the decision to dump Comey was

effectively made before Sessions and Rosenstein were brought in on Monday.

"Regardless of recommendation, I was going to fire Comey," Trump told NBC News.

Senator Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) called any threat by Rosenstein to resign "meaningless" and faulted him for agreeing to write the memo at all.

"Threatening to quit is meaningless, Mr. Rosenstein," Murphy wrote on Twitter. "You wrote a memo you knew would be used to perpetuate a lie. You own this debacle."

Attorney General Jeff Sessions did not comment directly on the criticism of Rosenstein Thursday but praised him in a speech in West Virginia on efforts to rein in opioid abuse.

Sessions referred to Rosenstein as "my great deputy attorney general" and saluted his quarter-century of service as a federal prosecutor. The comments came as the attorney general cited Rosenstein's devotion to fighting drug-related crime, including by filing charges over the shooting death of a three-year-old girl killed on a Baltimore porch in 2014 by an alleged member of a drug gang.

Ali Watkins contributed to this report.

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Comey firing shows Sessions' growing clout [Back](#)

By Eliana Johnson | 05/11/2017 05:08 AM EDT

President Donald Trump was infuriated in early March when Jeff Sessions recused himself from any investigations related to the 2016 presidential campaign. And yet, despite being legally sidelined from the investigation into Russia's meddling in the 2016 election, the attorney general — the ultimate Trump loyalist — has now played an indispensable political role by helping slow it down.

The White House said that Sessions and his deputy Rod Rosenstein urged the president in a closed-door meeting Monday to fire FBI Director James Comey, who had overseen the probe since its inception. At Trump's request, Sessions had set forth their rationale in twin memos the following day. News of his meeting with the president — as well his memo, which advised Trump that "a fresh start is needed at the leadership of the FBI" — served as Trump's first line of defense against accusations he had acted impetuously when he fired Comey without warning late Tuesday afternoon.

The drama was fresh evidence of Sessions' role as a critical political player in the Trump Cabinet. He has exhibited all the qualities of loyalty Trump most prizes: He was the first senator to endorse him, one of the few members of the upper chamber to embrace him enthusiastically during the presidential campaign, and, as his involvement in the Comey controversy demonstrates, has proved that he is willing to thrust himself into the breach and take political hits to advance the president's interests.

The president has rewarded that loyalty with trust. At the Department of Justice, he now enjoys full authority over the federal law enforcement apparatus.

"Jeff Sessions is truly the star of this show," said Chuck Cooper, a Supreme Court litigator and longtime friend. "In all of the areas within the Justice Department's jurisdiction, Jeff is moving in precisely the way that Trump had essentially promised his supporters that his administration would move — whether you're talking about law and order, immigration, judicial selection, or any of the other big-ticket items that come under the attorney general's realm."

When Trump temporarily soured on his chief strategist, Steve Bannon, and it looked like ideological moderates were on the ascent in the West Wing, National Review's Rich Lowry referred to Sessions — the ideological patron of immigration hawks and trade skeptics — as Trump's "indispensable man."

His involvement in the Comey controversy is emblematic of his role in the administration, where he and the network of aides he mentored over two decades on Capitol Hill — several of whom are now serving in posts throughout the administration — have prompted the president to bold action that has infuriated Republicans and Democrats alike. That network includes his longtime communications director, Stephen Miller, a senior adviser to the president, and his former chief of staff Rick Dearborn, the White House's deputy chief of staff for legislative affairs. Cliff Sims, a longtime friend and adviser, is a strategic communications aide to the president.

Outside the White House, Gene Hamilton, who served as Sessions' general counsel on the Senate Judiciary Committee, is now a senior adviser at the Department of Health and Human services. From that perch, he was one of just a handful of federal employees who — along with Miller and Bannon — helped to push through the president's initial travel ban, which was struck down in federal court.

Sessions' tenure has not been marred by the sort of infighting over personnel that has stymied other presidential advisers. In fact, senior Justice Department officials describe a relatively seamless relationship with the White House counsel's office — and with the president himself. While other Cabinet secretaries, most notably Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, have struggled to staff their departments due to disagreements with senior White House aides and the Office of Presidential Personnel, a senior Justice Department official said Sessions has essentially had free rein when it comes to hiring.

"I didn't have to interview with anybody," said a senior DOJ official. White House aides, he said, "were all sort of on board with Sessions folks. ... From that perspective, I feel like he's first among equals."

That said, there are limits to his influence. The administration has taken no action, for example, on one of the president's major campaign promises, the repeal of DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, an Obama-era provision that allows those brought into the country illegally as children to remain here. "It's true that Trump hasn't gone the full Jeb on immigration, but it's also true that the Bannon faction has lost some battles," said Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, referring to former Florida governor Jeb Bush, one of the leading champions of comprehensive immigration reform in the Republican Party.

In mid-February, the White House circulated a draft executive order that would have stopped the renewal of work permits under the provision — which allow those eligible to stay in the country for two years — but the president, on the advice of his son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner, decided against signing it. "What it suggests to me is that they have no idea what to do about DACA and that they are just kicking the can down the road," Krikorian said.

Elected to the Senate in 1996, Sessions was the most vocal immigration hawk in Congress, sounding the alarm about the threat posed by rising immigration levels long before Breitbart — which would eventually become the leading right-wing news outlet for his views — was founded in 2007. He worked to scuttle George W. Bush's 2007 immigration reform bill before Bannon arrived in Washington.

During the Republican primary, Sessions consulted with several candidates about immigration. He was, in essence, searching for a reliable candidate to carry his message into the presidential debates, something that Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Trump himself did with varying degrees of success. From the outset of Trump's campaign, however, Sessions and his team in the Senate, led by Miller, played a hidden role in Trump's campaign. It was Miller who wrote the immigration plan posted to his campaign website, which became evident when Trump deviated from it — endorsing an increase in the number of H-1B visas — during one of the Republican debates.

Sessions had never endorsed a candidate in a Republican presidential primary when he announced his support for Trump in February 2016 — and he became the first senator to back him in a contest that at the time still included two of his Senate colleagues, Cruz and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio. Since then, he has been one of the president's most loyal aides, which helps in part to explain his centrality in Trump world.

Sessions is prevailing over Kushner, with whom he has clashed on criminal justice reform, when it comes to making law enforcement a priority for the administration. Among those who have joined his inner circle at the Justice Department is Steven Cook, who, as a federal prosecutor and president of the National Association of Assistant U.S. Attorneys, was a leading opponent of the Obama administration's efforts to do away with mandatory minimum sentencing for nonviolent drug crimes and to reduce the prison population. He told Fox News' Bill O'Reilly last year that there is "no such thing as a nonviolent drug crime."

It's a dramatic turnaround for someone who defied a political near-death experience just weeks into his tenure. The president reacted with anger after Sessions decided to recuse himself from the investigations surrounding the 2016 election, which Trump worried would weaken his attorney general.

Sessions had pushed the idea of firing Comey at the outset of the administration, according to several people familiar with his thinking.

What exactly prompted Sessions to make his recommendation on Comey this week remains unclear.

Though most Republican lawmakers favored his dismissal, many questioned the timing of his firing and the haphazard manner in which it was carried out. "My view is that this should have probably been done on Day One, and so the timing is just kind of weird, but absent of the timing, it is defensible. I wish they would've done it Day One," said a senior Justice Department official.

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FBI agent groups dispute Trump's rationale for Comey firing [Back](#)

By Josh Meyer | 05/10/2017 10:57 PM EDT

As the White House scrambled to explain President Donald Trump's sudden firing of FBI Director James Comey, one of the main reasons given was that the nation's top law enforcement agent had lost the support of his own rank and file.

At best, that assertion has little basis in reality, according to the two people in the best position to know. More likely, they said, available anecdotal evidence suggests that it's flat-out wrong.

In interviews with POLITICO, the heads of the two associations representing current and retired FBI agents, analysts and other personnel said Wednesday that by all available measures, Comey enjoys enormous support among the 35,000 people who worked for him, and the many thousands of others who have retired or left the bureau.

"His support within the rank and file of the FBI is overwhelming," said Thomas O'Connor, a working FBI special agent who is president of the FBI Agents Association.

Comey's firing "was described to me today by at least three agents as a gut punch to the organization," said O'Connor, a counterterrorism agent in the FBI's Washington, D.C., field office. He said neither agents nor the association "saw this coming" and that few thought Comey did anything to deserve such treatment.

On Wednesday, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Trump's "termination" of Comey came after the president learned that the Justice Department and "bipartisan members of Congress" had lost confidence in the FBI director.

"Most importantly, the rank and file of the FBI had lost confidence in their director," Sanders said. "Accordingly, the president accepted the recommendation of his deputy attorney general to remove James Comey from his position."

O'Connor disputed Sanders' characterization: "I believe that that is not the perception of the FBI at all."

Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe also [directly contradicted](#) the White House explanation on Thursday, telling the Senate Intelligence Committee that his fired predecessor had not lost the confidence of rank-and-file agents. "Director Comey enjoyed broad support within the FBI and still does to this day," McCabe said.

Comey certainly had his detractors among some current and former FBI agents, especially for his decision not to prosecute Hillary Clinton after investigating her use of a private server for work emails as secretary of state, as well as allegations over misconduct at the Clinton Foundation.

Greg Roman, an intelligence analyst in the FBI's Kansas City field office, said Comey's

handling of the email probe and his public explanations for not filing charges "politicized the FBI, and it shook my confidence in his leadership abilities."

In an internal FBI employee survey in March 2017 that he provided to POLITICO, Roman wrote, "To say I was and am disappointed in Director Comey is an understatement, and I doubt I am hardly alone [in] saying this. ... I hope Director Comey can 'right the ship,' and I pray that he can do so."

But the two associations representing current and former FBI agents have been getting a steady flow of calls, emails and texts since Monday evening, virtually all of them lamenting Comey's firing and seeking answers as to why.

The FBI Agents Association, which O'Connor said has 13,000 members, issued a statement Tuesday night urging caution in the naming of a new FBI director, given the job's importance, and praising Comey for his "service, leadership, and support for Special Agents during his tenure."

"He understood the centrality of the Agent to the Bureau's mission, recognizing that Agents put their lives on the line every day," the statement said.

But since his firing, and in the months leading up to it, many agents contacted the association to urge it to do more to support Comey, O'Connor said.

"Most agents can't talk to the press," he said, but many were growing ever more agitated as Comey withstood withering criticism.

"They overwhelmingly want us to come out even stronger for Director Comey than we have, saying the association should do more," O'Connor said. "Now they want to know the reason this happened. And what's going to happen to the FBI now that Comey is gone?"

Newly installed Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein argued that Comey overstepped his bounds in a letter to Attorney General Jeff Sessions outlining his reasons for why the FBI needed new leadership.

Sanders did as well during the White House news conference.

While agents and other FBI personnel clearly have divergent viewpoints on Comey's handling of particular investigations, most believed the director always acted in the best interests of the FBI, especially in trying to make sure politics didn't interfere with the bureau's investigations, O'Connor said.

"They believe in the guy, they follow his leadership," he said, "and they knew that when Director Comey told them something, that it was accurate, Constitutional and apolitical."

Nancy Savage, executive director of the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI, said many current and retired agents were hopping mad — not only about Comey's firing, but also over how it was handled, with the FBI director finding out via a TV monitor while delivering a speech to agents in Los Angeles.

"My friends who are on duty have been texting me and they are appalled," said Savage, a former FBI special agent who retired in 2011 after a long career in the criminal division. "People were upset about losing him, and how he was informed. That's appalling to our

membership. He was a well-respected, well-liked director."

Current and former agents are especially upset that the Trump administration cited Comey's handling of the Clinton email probe as a top reason for firing him but didn't wait for the results of a formal review of his decisions by the Justice Department's inspector general, Savage said. "It just makes sense to wait for the IG report before doing something like this," she said.

Savage, who was also the longtime head of the FBI Agents Association, said neither group conducts any kind of scientific survey to measure the popularity of FBI directors. Like O'Connor, she said she was basing her assessment on anecdotal input from the society's 8,500 retired FBI members and other factors, including events and field visits.

And like O'Connor, she said Comey's handling of the Clinton and Trump investigations evoked strong feelings among current and former agents, and even some sharp criticism: "Certain disgruntled people are probably talking, and that will always happen in the agency."

During Savage's 34 years at the bureau, she worked under 10 directors or acting directors, including William Webster, William Sessions, Louis Freeh and Robert Mueller. Some of them, especially Mueller, "came in at a very difficult time, to a very difficult job and tried to make changes in an organization" that was often resistant to them.

As a result, she said, some of the other directors had a very mixed level of support among the rank and file. "I've heard negative things about other directors, but an overwhelmingly positive response on Comey. And that's not always the norm."

Savage was among a small group of former agents who met last Friday with Comey at FBI headquarters to discuss some of his strategic initiatives for the bureau. As usual, she said, he was upbeat, and eager to explain his plans for upgrading information technology tools to better equip agents for fighting high-tech and cyber crime.




Wednesday evening, Comey finally commented publicly on his firing the day before. But instead of criticizing Trump's decision or defending his actions, he sent a note to bureau employees conveying that their affection for him was mutual.

"I have long believed that a President can fire an FBI director for any reason, or for no reason at all. I'm not going to spend time on the decision or the way it was executed," Comey wrote. "I hope you won't either. It is done, and I will be fine, although I will miss you and the mission deeply."

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